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ABSTRACT

The People Program is an educational effort being conducted at 20 worksites throughout Kentucky with more than 4,000 employee contacts. Part 1 of the People Program consists of a series of six 15-minute programs discussing problems experienced by parents of young children, and presented to them during their lunch break. Two main themes are stressed throughout the series: (1) selecting quality care for children while parents work and (2) strengthening parent-child relationships and making the most of their time when the family is together. Part 2 of the People Program is a series of four 15-minute sessions presented during the lunch break for employees with teenaged children. This series explores such areas as peer pressure, communication, self identity, and handling parent-teen conflicts. The success of these programs stems from the companies' recognition that these programs are feasible and not a waste of time or cost to the company, are strictly voluntary, do not interfere with productivity, are conducted in a minimum of time during the lunch break, tend to improve employee-employer relationships, and tend to reduce employee absenteeism related to child-care arrangements. Management and employee pre- and posttests and evaluation forms showed very favorable responses. Part 3 of the People Program deals with occupational stress management, and is designed for supervisory and management personnel. This newest component has also been highly rated by participants. The People Program demonstrates that industry is willing to become involved in employees' problems and that such programs are a viable means of reaching adults. (KC)

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"THE PEOPLE PROGRAM - PARENTING AND STRESS EDUCATION IN AN INDUSTRIAL SETTING

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The People Program is a unique educational effort being conducted at worksites throughout Kentucky. Employees have a choice of two programs on child care (Part 1 for employees with pre-school aged children or Part 2 for employees with teen-aged children) or a program on Occupational Stress Management for supervisory or management personnel.

Today more and more business leaders and industrialists are showing a great deal of interest in knowing about the personal and social problems of their employees, and in devising ways they might help solve them. Such programs are becoming increasingly common in corporate America. An increasing number of companies are developing or providing programs to help troubled workers, help executives cope with pressures, and advise managers on meeting the psychological needs of their employees.

Today more and more companies are calling on consulting firms to help in this endeavor. For example, the Chicago based consulting firm of Rohrer, Hibler and Replogle reported recently that the number of its corporate clients has doubled over the past decade to more than 600.

In part, this is a result of more humane attitudes in top management, in part it is related to the self-interest of the company. It's become apparent that the psychological problems of workers can cost business a fortune. Alcoholism alone robs industry

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of $15.6 billion a year in absenteeism and medical care. What's more, a number of medical studies have shown conclusively that up to 70% of the headaches, hypertension, and peptic ulcers that affect employees resulting in loss of work and severely straining medical insurance programs are stress related.

Obviously there are a great many emotional and psychological problems affecting workers today. Parts 1 and 2 of the People Program are designed to help employees deal with the issues of parenting as it relates to job performances. Examples of these problems might be:

1. An employee who is having marital or family difficulties, and is so distracted by them that his or her work begins to suffer.
2. The child of an employee has become involved with drugs, is truant from school, or has run away from home, and the employee is so concerned that he/she finds it difficult to work.
3. The female employee who is having internal conflicts between her drive for a career or the necessity of working, and her feeling that she should be home with the children doing what her husband or others possibly expect of her.
4. Or in another aspect of parenting, the employee who is worried about aging parents who can no longer cope on their own, but doesn't know what kinds of plans should be made or what resources are available in the community.

By addressing these types of problems it pays off, both for employees and employers. Kennecott Copper of Utah, for example, after providing services to employees with personal problems such as these, achieved a 44% reduction in some categories of absenteeism.

More and more employees today are becoming increasingly aware of the extent to which personal problems (as related to parenting), are interfering with job performance. One recent study in this area pointed out the following:

-- 1/2 of the managerial staff interviewed knew of working mothers who had terminated work because of child care problems.
-- 2 out of 5 working mothers reported off-the-job problems which interfered with job performance.
-- Almost 16% of the working mothers had considered quitting work because of child care problems.
-- About 17% of the working mothers reported they had previously quit a job because of child care problems.

This study emphasizes many of the problems experienced by working women, and with the increasing number of women in the labor force (50% of adult women are in the work force, and 39% of these women have children under 6) these problems are receiving more and more attention.

The People Program (Parts 1 and 2) are designed to meet these concerns. So far the programs have been conducted in 20 worksites across Kentucky with employee contacts totaling over 4,000. Part I consists of a series of six 15 minute programs discussing problems experienced by parents, and presented to them during their lunch break. Two main themes are stressed throughout the series:

1. How to select quality care for children while the parents work.
2. Strengthening parent-child relationships, and making the most out of their time when the family is together.

Part 2 of the People Program is a series of four 15 minute sessions presented during the lunch break for employees with teen-aged children. This series explores such areas as peer-pressure, communication, self-identity, and handling parent-teen conflicts.

The success of these programs stems largely from the fact that we have been able to demonstrate to companies that these programs: (1) are feasible and not a waste of time or cost to the company, (2) are strictly voluntary, (3) does not interfere with productivity, (4) conducted in a minimum of time (15 minutes) presented during a portion of the employees lunch break, (5) tend to improve employee-employer relationships, and (6) tend to reduce employee absenteeism as related to child-care arrangements.

Management pre and post tests, as well as employee pre and post tests were administered, along with employee evaluation forms. Chi square and analysis of variance were then conducted on the data. Results indicate a positive shift (.02 level) in employee attitudes toward the child care information, and techniques recommended in the programs. Ninety two (92) percent of participants expressed a desire for company to provide similar additional programs. Eighty (80) percent of management believed that by helping employees become more comfortable with child care arrangements, it may result in a more stable, dependable employee. Eighty Five (85) percent of management believed programs strengthened the relationship between company and employees. Employees have become more aware of what community resources are available for their families use. Employees showed an increased awareness of the concept of total child care.

Part 3 of the People Program deals with Occupational Stress Management. It is designed for supervisory and management personnel.

Today, there is a growing demand for stress management training. The two major reasons: health and money.

Stress has been shown to cause numerous health related problems. These include heart disease, alcoholism, high blood pressure, ulcers and more.

Heart disease alone is estimated to cost nearly 30 million lost workdays and 15 billion dollars in wages each year. Alcoholism accounts for another 15 billion dollars lost.

Part 3 of the People Program, "Occupational Stress Management," can be presented to employees in a variety of time slots depending on the needs of the company.

Included in the "Occupational Stress Management" program is identification of various stressors, discussion on the symptoms of stress, including substance abuse, and explains Type A and Type B personalities. It then describes ways of coping with stressful situations such as tension-relaxation exercises, stress-management plans, time-management and life-management skills.

"Occupational Stress Management" training is the newest segment of the People Program effort aimed at worksite education. So far it has only been conducted for one corporation in Kentucky. While judging the effects of stress management training on people and organizations is difficult, we did receive some information regarding the effectiveness of the training by conducting an immediate follow-up valuation on a convenient sample of participants. When asked to compare the occupational stress management program to others they had see on television, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc. on a scale of 1-10 (1 = much worse than, 10 = much better than), 38 participants rated the program 6.54.

When asked whether they wanted their tax dollars to continue supporting this type of program, 82% (31/38) said yes. Medical personnel at the plant also reported that participants were eager to learn pragmatic techniques for easing tension and many were in fact practicing the skills taught. They also reported that some employees were encouraged through their participation in the training to seek additional counseling to gain further control of the stresses within their lives.

The success of all three segments of the People Program clearly demonstrates a willingness on the part of industry to become involved to some extent in the social and personal problems of their employees. The People Program also demonstrated that such worksite programs are a viable method of reaching adults with a variety of educational programs.